

Short Fiction in Indian Literature
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Lecture – 12D
Short Fiction in Indian Literature - Overview I

Hello and welcome to this session. Today, we are going to have a conversation on some of the major thematic concerns with regards to the first 4 weeks of subject matter and today I have with me Ms. Sanjana and Mr. Aakash who are all MA students at IIT Madras. I hope you will have a enjoyable time watching this conversation. Hello guys. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Hello mam. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”**

So I, I wanted to explore this idea of themes as, as a kind of conceptual framework across the 4 texts that we studied on this course. So gender seems to keep coming up as a major obsession or preoccupation on, on the part of the writers, be it male or female. So how do we approach this big category, gender, in relation to some of the texts. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes, I was actually looking at gender, like throughout the different stories, like for example in Kabuliwala.

The way the mother is portrayed or even Mini for example, how she is portrayed and it was, like mother is very margin. She does not really have a role that she plays throughout the story and even where ever she is portrayed, she is seen as an over-nagging or bragging. So what can we like understand. Yes, yes. What do you think Aakash? So the one story out of all these 4 where the protagonists are female is Summer Vacation.

And Summer Vacation has very strong female characters. Yes. The character of Muthassi, albeit she is very traditional in her approach towards life and everything, but she is a very strong female character. Yes. She is the head of the household. Yes, yes. So, that, that keeps coming up. Yes. In The Flood, for example, there is a marginalization and, and there is no female character that has been talked about.

Yes, yes, quite right. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** So, and if we look at Karma, we

have a Lachmi, the really fat and fair Lachmi who is again in the fringes but who kind, of comes up with a way, in a symbolic way towards the close of the novel, right. So, I will, I will begin with Kabuliwala where we have a, a female character who is kind of towing the gender, stereotype.

She is naturally timid. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** I mean that the conversation we were having this for the recording. So we have the artist, the, the writer, the first person, narrator describing the wife for the benefit of the readers here, yes. So she is naturally timid, she is naturally suspicious, right and she does not have a kindly disposition towards the stranger.

So that gender stereotype is played out really nicely to put it ironically in that story. But on the other hand, if we look at The Flood, we just have this pregnant wife. We have the 4 children. So she again does what is her designated role in life which is reproduce and she does that. She has 4 children. Fifth children is on the way and, and she is passive. We do not hear her at all, at all, right.

“Professor - student conversation starts” That is right. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** So that, and that is there and the total contrast to this is obviously the Summer Vacation and so we have a matriarch there, owe them matriarch. So can we, can we explore more about this figure. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes. Definitely so. So mam, in Summer Vacation, despite the fact that protagonists are both females, there is this importance of motherhood, that is brought by this minor character called Bharati.

And she uses a hyperbole to point out the fact that Ammu has not grown up in the care of her mother. So what do you think of that? Yes, yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** It, I mean, I, I think Kamala does really hates or dislikes this exaggerated cliché of, you know, motherhood being like moon light. You cannot, you know, do without one or the other. So as soon as she kind of voices out that cliché, we can see Muthassi, you know, getting up, you know, very annoyed.

And she removes Ammu from that space, from that space of gossip on the part of the village women and she comes up with an excuse saying, you know, my servant is really lazy, I need to go check in on him and then very very interestingly, she does not allow Ammu to come in to contact with these other women for the second time, right. She says that can I have my tea with the other women in, in bikini and she says, no and it is a cut no and we can kind of read into that, into that no and see that she is trying to protect this child from the harsh words or the cruelty of these gossips.

But again what is attacked there is the exaggerated notions of motherhood and in fact for Ammu, Muthassi herself is like a mother, you know, who is very protective, who is very caring and she is very very in control of that situation contrary to the other mothers that we see, right. So, so we have a really strong figure and that has something to do with the tradition of Kerala, right, which has these matriarchal households and especially we have this Nair community and this huge house which is run by this female figure.

So we have that pravadhan which neatly played out and she is the boss over everybody, you know, from the driver to the steward to the servant figure, everybody, you know, kind of chose her line. So that is a, that is a very interesting contrast that we have, that has connections to the socioeconomic traditions of a particular region unlike the others that we come across. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Definitely so mam. Yes.

But this particular statement on motherhood, what relevance do you think it has even in the contemporary Indian society where, where the tradition keeps, basically keeps emphasizing the importance of motherhood and the independent woman. Yes. This is in a conflict that is present still about the, you know, motherhood is still emphasis the most important pinnacle of being a woman.

Yes, yes. But why Kamala Das is trying to counter that? Yes, yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** Quite right. I think this notion of glorifying a particular role in the family has negative dividends for the person who is being glorified, right. She will have to stick to that aura. She will have to carry up all the duties and all the responsibilities attached to that particular,

you know, role and she would obviously be losing out on other activities which are there in the public sphere.

So that is there and may be that is why, may be interestingly Kamala Das removes that mother figure from that narrative itself. She is dead, you know, one way she is an absent figure, the other way it is, it is, it is necessary to make this child grow up more independently, you know, know more about the realities of life, very quickly, you know. So Ammu is, is the beneficiary as well as she is losing out of course, you know, growing up motherless is very difficult but she will also grow up in a very very mature way as well.

“Professor - student conversation starts” Yes. Also about the 2 female figures of both Ammu and Muthassi. So we could see Ammu as the, like Muthassi the current matriarch and Ammu possibly the next matriarch who would take over and we see Achitan here trying to... Yes. You know, the favourable to both Muthassi and as well as Ammu, get both their favours. Yes, absolutely. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”**

Did you notice that, I mean, he, he makes like these, he had these slight glances, right towards her and she does not like that? She wants to, you know, be on the side of her grandmother because she has her loyalties there and in the same time, she does not want to be too harsh to him which is why she somehow puts physical distance between the 2 of them. She goes and sits on the steps that leads out of the kitchen, right.

So we can see that physical distancing happening there. At the same time, she does not want to be too harsh towards him which is why she changes the topic. So you can see this very young child, you know, being very very diplomatic in the way she handles the people around her. So which is why I made that earlier comment about how this motherless girl grows up really fast, you know, and, and she is kind of resembling her grandmother in some ways, may be not the harsher side of it but the more diplomatic side of it comes up.

So what do you make of this other 2 set of female characters, Nani Amma and Amni and she is a very very interesting figure and some of the interesting details that come out is the ring that she

wears, right. This girl Ammu sees her torn blouse, the ragged clothes and she also notices that intricate ring and she says, she is fortunate to be wearing that ring and that ring is attractive, right.

So we have this woman here who is very poor but she also has these aesthetic taste and that has become, meaning, evident there in the jewellery that she wears and, and the other thing is the nurturing attitude that she has towards her own daughter. Even while they are standing together, she is caressing the hair of her little daughter and she kind of sweeps the floor with her feet. She clears the, you know, floor.

She spreads the mundu for the both of them, you know. You can notice these tiny, you know, details that kind of lays there, you know. The psyche of these two, I mean this particular woman who wants the best for her child in these straightened circumstances, right and, and that brings up the pathos and, and this woman, what does she says is really harsh, is not it? She says you know you cannot come to me every other day and, and make me give you a job and, and she takes that, very passively.

She keeps smiling and that is the weapon for her. It is, it is like a blocking technique. No matter how harsh you are, I will just smile and take it because I have to get the food. So all these become really really evident and there lies the tragedy of these two figures. And what about the, the context in which this girl was born? Do you remember those details? Amni, what is the backdrop.

“Professor - student conversation starts” Yes, so she does not really know the exact age. So she says the time when there was a flood that is the time, I mean, that is the time I remember she was born. So she must be some 10 years old or know some 3 years. Yes. And that is, that is actually very important when we read about the countryside. I, I think even today in countryside, quite a lot of people... Yes.

Quit a, lot of people who are of older generation, they do not really remember the day they were born. Yes. Or the date they were born. Yes, yes. And even in the records, the records are not

actually like totally correct there. Yes. They are just somewhat precise. Yes, yes, quite right. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** We, we have similar instances, I mean, I am talking about other stories which are not there in this, you know, set that we are talking about.

For instance, the Blue Umbrella, we have, you know, we do not know the precise age of Binya. It is just an, an approximation to a particularly, you know, heavy snowfalls, heavy snow storms or something of that sort, right. As though they keep time according to natural events, you know. They become landmarks and even this old man, Munim in R. K. Narayan's *Astrologer's Day*. He keeps time according to all these fera lines, right.

So, so this talks about a particular kind of society which is still very rural, still very close and communion with nature and natural incidents and still far away from modernity. So that is communicated to us through these, you know, details, you know, the confusion about age is, is a good give away. But the point that I want to come back to is this girl, Amni is born during a particularly bad, hard monsoon season.

There, there are floods and then there is nobody to care for this pregnant woman, right. Everybody is leaving the village, that is what she says. Everybody is in a hurry to leave with their pots and pans. I was on my own, you know. I was on the bed lying and there was nobody. I thought I was going to die. So that is an indication of the precarious nature of the family in which she is in, she is probably on her own with just this child to look after.

So where is the father? You know, what about the other family members. So all these questions keep coming up. So we see more, you know, breakaway families in the story. Muthassi is on her own. Ammu is without a mother. Father is far away in Calcutta and, and he refuses to come home to the, you know, to the in-laws and we have Amni who just has a mother. We do not about the father figure, who is supposed to be the provider according to the patriarchal theory that is, you know, played out in this Indian society.

So if we look very closely, we can ask all these questions with regard to gender and family. So despite the fact that men are supposed to provide, men are supposed to care for. They are not able

to do so due to various factors that are there in society and what are those factors. So we need to ask all these questions? We might not always find the answers but these questions will be very very helpful.

“Professor - student conversation starts” Yes. Another very important, I, I think aspect of gender that plays out in Summer Vacation, is the conception of beauty, I believe. Because there is an incidence where, you know, where she is discussing, where Muthassi is discussing it with the other ladies who are, who have come to the household and I believe the, the take away is that fact and fair, is... Yes.

Is the beauty which is totally in contrast with what we, what the urban India or what the modern urban India looks at. Yes, yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** So it is an interesting observation. I have never thought of this in that particular way and one thing that struck me in relation to beauty was, everybody is dark. All the women are dark. We, we do not get any references to fair skinned women.

But these dark, Muthassi is dark, Ammu is dark, Amni is dark, Nani Amma is dark. I mean, and different shades of darkness are there and in fact, Muthassi's eyes are compared to the naval fruit, right. Very scary image, you know, imagine those two, you know, fruits as eyes and then on a ceramic white plate. So it is scary image and we have similar ghostly associations with eyes with regard to Nani Amma's daughter, right.

So darkness seems to be a, a major colour that is associated with the women. I do not know how to understand that perhaps the association is with the rural Kerala. I am just speculating here and with regard to being plump, Nani Amma thinks, I mean Muthassi thinks that Ammu is not plump enough. She is not healthy enough and she has not been cared for enough probably because she is with her father.

And there is no mother figure to do all these traditional jobs of looking after, feeding, nurturing the child. So that association is there but we have a plump child there with, with the mother. Bharati's child is really plump, right. You know, she calls some rascal who has just had his feed.

So again that same gender associations a mother will really nurture the child, a motherless, you know, a motherless girl will not be really thriving.

So but I, I, maybe we need to think more about this. The urban notions of what is beauty and the rural notions of what is beauty. So I am just going to leave it there because other comments that I make will be more speculative in nature. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes and coming to the other stories of Kabuliwala and Karma, we can sort of see her in both of these stories the women are the characters that are seen as, they are carrying all the tradition and the, they are still more typically Indian.

Yes. If you will. Well the father in Kabuliwala says he is modern and he does not believe in these things and in Karma, it is... That is an interesting comparison and I feel that the author in Karma refers to the wife of Mohan Lal once as Lachmi and then as Mistress Lal as well. So... Yes, yes. Why, why is he using both these terms. Okay, yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”**

Even I have thought of this difference in terms, you know, applied to this particular female character. Sometimes it is lady love, you know. It is almost ironically done. She is not a lady. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes. She said this right. There is a lot of irony there. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** She is, as you mentioned, fat and fair, and here I want to pick up on your early notion about fatness and being fair, because she is not like the Piccadilly prostitutes who are most probably very slim, very attractive and very fair.

She is more earthy in that sense, very fat and she does not care about her appearance, right. She wears a really a crumpled sari, dirty sari with a red border. She does not care about her appearance. You know, she belches and she you know, eats pan. So she is not in any sense like a class English lady. So that contrast is brought about and she seems to be symbolising the rest of these, you know, assorted crowd of Indians, who do not care too much about how they appear to the rest and, and she also talks quite a lot with her inferiors, right.

She is very chirpy too. And even that is very unlady like, is not it? So again that, that division is really made. The Indianness of Lachmi and the non-Indianness of Sir Mohan Lal. **“Professor -**

student conversation starts” And I think just like you said that Lady Lal is used ironically. I think naming the character Lachmi... Yes, yes. Is also very ironic because Lachmi is supposed to be the goddess of wealth.

Yes, yes. Quite right. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** And she, she, it is a very interesting name and, and the, the goddess association somehow grants her some kind of sacredness of soul. She seems to kind of, at the end of the story, dole up justice in some way, poetic justice, a rough justice when she spits on her husband, right. So there we can again connected to the associations with divinity there and again Lachmi, what, what was the question again?

“Professor - student conversation starts” Mam, so the name Lachmi is also ironic in, in a way because... The goddess of wealth, Yes. She is a goddess of wealth and she is not treated fairly by her husband. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** Okay, so, I will, I will go back to that point. She lives in a bungalow obviously and, and she occupies the upper story and he is on the ground floor.

There is hardly any relationship between the two. The barest of the bones are maintained but the funny thing is she is the only one in the story who offers money to the man who has helped carry the stuff or to the train. In fact, this rich barrister, the Wazir, the Sir Mohan Lal does not seem to offer anybody any kind of money, right. So may be again, I am, I am just trying to make connections to this goddess of Lachmi thing in the sense that she offers money to this poor guy who is in need, right.

And I am reminded again of the price of banana as where this rich businessman, know, does not give any money to the cooley. I mean at least the money that he has been, you know, owed by him. So it is a very interesting comparison. So I would kind of, you know, endorse the connection with the goddess in that way. Lachmi and Sir Mohan Lal is a very interesting couple, right.

I have this question for you? He does not like her very much. He puts her in the, you know, in the

class of jnana, he travels first class. But the very fact that they are travelling together, it is a very very interesting notion. What are the significances of that, can we speculate on that? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes. From what I think, it also signifies the fact that she cannot live without her husband.

She cannot live independently. So he has to take her where ever he goes. And it is, it is more like, she is not treated like a human person. She is treated more like some, some stuff. Yes. Actually. Yes. She is like the parallel her with the servants also. She just has to follow the will of her master which is her husband. And it is, it is a trope of obedient wife that actually keeps coming up in, in the literature.

Yes, yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** So, you know the opening scene is pretty interesting in that regard because we have this man who is looking at the mirror. He is adjusting his, you know, outfit and all and he is talking to the mirror and he imagines the mirror talking to him. It is a fantastic situation that way and then he calls the bearer and asks for a glass of Scotch or Whisky or something of that sort and we have this poor woman who is sitting outside, you know, exposed to the elements in some sense.

She is just outside that first class waiting room and in that difference in hierarchy could not be made more apparent, right. She is sitting on that steel trunk and she is having a conversation with the cooley because the bearer has gone into pour her husband a drink, right. And, so that tells you how protected she is. He is not doing his job, right. Now that makes very very clear. As a husband he is supposed to care for her, protect, the husband.

So that is not being done there. So he is kind of subverting the same patriarchal rules that applies to most of the men in Indian soil. So that is one thing. The other thing is, as you said, she is not treated as a human being. She is more, more or less like a property and the word master is very interesting there. She tells the cooley, I am, I am travelling with my master. So master-slave relationship is, is something that is happening between the two of them, right.

And again the Indian setup is in such a way that in those days they were literally the slaves, the

property, right. Not like in these days with rights and, you know, rights to property and other kinds of rights. So that is there and I want to bring this idea of master and slave to in The Flood where Chanan has his master. So we have the collapse of the, you know, and the gender relationship.

Here in this terminology of master and slave, can we talk more about that? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes. So would you like to talk about the parallels, basically the parallels that are the relationship between Chanan as master and Chanan and its, and the parallels of that to Chanan and his dog. Yes, we can see that initially who Chanan sort of left behind by his master and, and, and then later you feel that this is a dog being left behind by Chanan.

So and we also can think about whether this was done intentionally or... Yes. Unintentionally. But yes, so this, you can see the parallels of the master-slave relation here and it was done in, I guess, intentionally to... Yes, yes. Bring it out. Yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** The, the important parallels are Chanan occupies the same gender position as Lachmi in relation to the two masters, right.

So we, we have Chanan in a very very weak passive situation, even though he is the head of the family within his domestic space. In relation to the master, he is in a powerless situation which is the situation of most women in the Indian context, right. So that parallel is very very apparent there and in fact again, the dog, even we look at the relationship between the dog and Chanan. The dog is in a powerless and weak position.

Dog is, can be symbolically compared to the women, the weaker sex, right. So we have similar such power parallels happening across, you know, the society and the literature. So there are nuances to various relationships that we can pick up or, and, and discuss in great detail, yes. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** So in this way, the author also tries to bring out the concerns of the downtrodden through the dog and also somewhat through Chanan.

Yes, yes, that is, that is true. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** The dog becomes a great symbol, right, is a catchall in some ways. The dog could represent Chanan himself, you know. If

Chanan was left behind, what would have been his status, you know. You most probably have been eaten by the crocodile, you know, and, when the flood waters had risen. The dog resembles or stands for the lower caste, praya, Chanan, the dog also stands for all the powerless, all the vulnerable, all the marginalized, all the people who are in the fringes, who are supposed to be rescued, you know, by the powerful, the rich, the wealthy.

But who are not doing anything to help them in, in, in, from situations of distress. So that symbol is, is a very very wide symbol and we can apply it to. That is why we, we do not necessarily have to see the dog as an outcaste. It, it stands for any and every, you know, weak, vulnerable and, and. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** It could stand for a female, you know.

It could stand for, you know, the lowest of the species, you know, some of the, you know (()) (26:18), you know. You name it, you know. If you look at children, they would, they would easily kind of stamp out, the (()) (26:24) smaller ones that you use, right. But they would really, you know, be frightened of the bigger creatures. You can apply this across, you know, the humans and the non-living and then the, you know, the animal world too.

“Professor - student conversation starts” And we can also see this numerous instances where like there are boats that are coming that could potentially rescue the dog but then they do not, do not rescue the dog in the end. Yes, yes. So that can also be that, it is not that people cannot help but it is just they chose not to. Yes, yes. Yes, that is a, that is a very important incident in the story, I thought. Yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”**

Okay, so the boats get 3 times, right and that is, that is very very interesting. The hopes are built out, you know, the first star which really hard to see this guy coming in a rowboat, bringing this coconut water and leaving and the dog is wagging its tail and hoping to be rescued, right. So that indifference is expressed to that gesture. You, you look at a creature in distress and then you were indifferent over you, enjoy your life and pleasures and then walk away.

So that is the first thing and the second thing is they notice it, very clearly they notice it and they

leave it there, right. Again, brutal indifference and the third time, it is callousness because they are also attacking, right. So why do they attack? Can we talk about it? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** The dog is preventing, I mean, the dog is doing its duty, sort of but since it is already in a position, they just feel it is okay to abuse it further and leave.

Yes, yes, absolutely. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** It is just doing its job and the men are supposed to help the dog and, and rescue it but, but what they do is since this is a weaker being and since they think they are powerful enough to overpower this dog, they attack it, right. So that thing is also there. The fact that you can overpower this creature because it is vulnerable makes these egoistic human beings attack the dog.

So we have materialism, greed, selfishness, you know, exploitation, all these things, themes come apart, come across in that act. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Definitely so. Yes, actually one of the things about in the flood is there are references to the temple being submerged up till the neck in one, one point of the story. Also there is chanting of the Ramayana. So like we see few religious sort of symbols put out here and there in the story which is sort of attacking, the story in general is trying to attack the kind of oppression and the kind of things that come with the social system and the religion.

So how do you see these sort of religious symbols put in the story. Okay, yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** You are quite right. It is up to story begins with the deity neck deep in water. That is how the story. It is a very powerful opening. Is not it? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes. That can symbolize the fact that the deity himself is helpless. Yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”**

In some sense, yes. In some interpretations, yes. You can read it that way. The other thing that we should not forget is that detail where the temple becomes a refuge for so many creatures, right, for so many human beings, actually the numbers are given there, the precise numbers are there. These many men and these many women that there are, these many cats were there, these many dogs were there.

An assortment of lives is there and, and the temple is a heaven to the majority but not to all, right. The deity does take care of some, a majority of humanity and, and living things but not all. Some beings are left behind, right. So what do we do then. I mean, how are we supposed to act in those moments? Should we put aside, you know, greed and materiality and act as civilized human beings and, and a kind of rescue the things.

Even though you, you think those things are the other. The dog is an other, right. I have had students ask me this question perhaps these folks were scared of the dog, you know. Not many people are, are comfortable with dogs being close to them. So why do not we look at it that way. I mean fair enough, fair enough. But we should really also understand the context. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Context. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”**

You know, the situation, read the situation, what is the dog, is it ready to attack you at that particular moment, most probably no. So you need to kind of put your fears on the backseat and act like, you know, generous, benevolent, you know, human beings in those situations, right. And, and why do you fear the other? Because the dog here is a symbol. Mean the dog is not a, you know, dog per say it is a symbol for all the others who are unlike you.

How do you react to the other? How do you react to a beggar? How do you react to a woman in ragged clothes, right? So all these questions can be asked, right. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes and that, and I think now it has lot of parallels to society as well. We should question out, you know, what, how, it is a natural reaction we got... Yes. Naturally but it is a reaction that people generally have towards things that they are not familiar with.

Absolutely, absolutely. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** If you stand, you know, if you are stuck in traffic and you are in a car, you, you see beggars coming and knocking on the car windows and ask you for money, some people cannot even bear the sight. So they just turn their faces away. It is, it is a natural "reaction" but how do you deal with the reaction and how do you kind of, you know, deal with the situation, you know, how do you deal with the others?

So these questions need to be asked. Of course, there is no simple answer to that question but we

need to ask these questions. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** I think that this phenomenon of, of othering also brings us to this question of identity. Yes. Which is a very relevant in the context of these 4 stories. And specially in Karma because it is about him not being grounded in his roots.

Yes, yes, yes. Quite right, quite right. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** He says that, you know, my 5 years in, in Britain was, you know, better than those 40 odd years that I spent in India, right. He is stuck, he is stuck in that particular period, right. He draws his identity from those brief years that he spent in, in England, in, in Britain. How do, how do we understand that, you know.

He is completely dissatisfied with his life in home, right, on his homeland and he is caught between these 2 identities and he sides or he is on the side of the colonisers, against the colonised. So it is a very very difficult, you know, situation from which we need to understand his identity. Why is he dissatisfied? All these questions needed to be, why is he dissatisfied in, in his own homeland?

What makes him happy there? Is it real happiness? Does he draw real sustenance, spiritual sustenance from, from Britain? What kind of sustenance does he draw? And we look at those details, there are so many details that comes up and, and the details that he is fascinated by, the spires of this Oxford University, the gowns, the grey gowns, the Piccadilly prostitutes, the dinners, the games, all these are superficial.

Do you want to talk about that in some sense? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes. Yes, definitely so. Yes, they are all, you can see how he is, he has a very superficial view as you said of in the likening. Then also very class, classes view, because... Yes. This is not the normal life of every person in England. It is the life of a selected upper class in England. Yes. Which he thinks of is the most ideal.

And he despises his own country, he, within what he does, he thinks if he dresses up and if he, you know, wears the clothes of an Englishman, those are the ways to like to be English total. It is

very superficial enjoyments and very superficial things that he picks up. I think that is also connected to how Mohan Lal perceives himself as compared to how others might perceive Mohan Lal, just like those 2 soldiers who somewhat are clueless about who we actually is.

Yes. But then they... see, skin colour and then they pin him down to his race and... Yes, yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** So to, to connect these ideas that you have just expressed, so there is superficiality and that superficiality is associated with the upper classes, the nobility, the land of gentry, right who go to Oxford, enjoy all these dinners and all these, you know, material pleasures.

He does not learn how to lead a life; how should one conduct one's life? All these questions are not learnt during his 5-year period of stay in Britain. Instead what he picks up is the times, and, and the Scotch and the English cigarette which he proudly displays to get the attention of these English folks so that he could go back through them, use them as some kind of channel, medium so that he could, you know, imagine those vast visitors of England, that the dreamy squares of Oxford and things like that.

So it is a, it is a very very false world with which he is in love and, and that is just obviously by these working class soldieries who are, who are not obviously from the (()) (35:34). They do not speak the queen's English, they do have the Oxford accent, they are drunk, you know. Mohan Lal drinks but he does not get drunk. He just, you know, partakes little bit of drink just before he boards the train and so there is a vast difference between these classes.

He keeps the high class, you know. He keeps the high class and he is attacked by these figures, the subordens in some sense. Even within the British domestic context, the subordinates who throw him out. So he, he really does not understand the realities of life, realities neither of British life or of England life. So he somehow lost in that chasm between the two. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** So that also brings us to this takeaway, I believe if we sum up in, sum it up in a sentence, it would be that, however much one tries to shrug off their identity.

Yes. That they have chosen themselves but this was hated because of the birth. It does not really

go off. Yes, yes. For better or for worse, it does not. Yes, yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** So and, and, and that identity, you know, is a problematic identity for Mohan Lal. He does not want to, you know, adhere to that identity because it is a weaker identity.

Being a colonised is not a admirable, you know, recognition for his psyche which is why he wants to be on the other side which is oppressing, right, the locals, the, the indigenous population. So he does not like that weak position. So that is something we need to understand. So this identity is seen as weak and in fact, the 2 soldiers, you know, club everybody together as Nigers, you know.

For them everybody is seen Asians or, you know, Africans, Black Africans, whoever they are. They are all the same. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes, more or like. Yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** Non-whites. They all clump together and regardless of the fact that they are well writ, literate, you know, intellectuals. They do not care, you know. You just go with the white and the black and, and then the black is inferior.

So stamp them out. So and the times and all his baggage, everything is thrown out and, and I do not know how to see that. I mean, of course, you know, he is condemnable because he shirks of his own homeland, you know, in order to, you know, oppress symbolically the locals but, you know, at the end of the day, he is being attacked, that is a racist attack. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** I also wanted to talk about this is one point where there are 2, so basically he sees the English soldiers, he decides that he is going to, you know, talk to the--.

Yes. Conductor if there is any problem. So he perceives himself to be a superior position. Yes. Perhaps because of his class and he has been knighted, because of these things. But, yes, in the end, it shows the, like race is still colonial India and... Yes. It is still a system of. The realities of life... Yes. In this, in the temporal context. Yes, yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** The brute power, the brute power of these English soldiers ultimately wins, you know, in that battle of context.

Your times, reading capacity is not helping you at that moment. He is shouting for the guard and

he is not heard by the guard who is at the end of the compartment next to his wife, right. The jnana and the guards compartment are next to each other, the tail end. So they are miles apart literally and, you know, symbolically and he does not get the help that he really needs. So this is a really complex tale where there are, you know, complexities in the sense of colonial rule.

The identities of the weak and the powerful, you know, working classes and the upper classes and all these are, you know, kind of intermeshed here in the story, intermingled and it somehow becomes, at the end of the day, it becomes difficult to really be happy about his state. Because we are always reminded of that great example of Gandhi being thrown out of the train when he was travelling in the first class compartment, right.

So we need to condemn the racial attack. At the same time, we need to also, you know, see that he is acting in a less admirable way and the way he treats his fellow human beings, fellow Indians. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** So you could it as both a tragedy as if the comic. Yes, yes. It, it has the tragic, comic... Yes. Overtones at the end of the day. I think so. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”**

So how about Kabuliwala? I think we should talk more about the Kabuliwala in relation to gender as well as the idea of identity, right. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** So when coming to identity, how do you think the foreigner is in of Kabuliwala plays a role in the story. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** The thing is there has been a tradition of these migrants, you know, temporary migrants coming to, you know, Calcutta to sell their wares, you know, you know, to, you know, sell their stuff and then they go back.

They are seasonal migrants. So they are not aberrations on the horizon of Calcutta, even in the 19th century. It is quite common. So which is why the term is pretty easy for a Mini to kind of voice her, O, Kabuliwala. She must have heard it somewhere, you know, called out in the, in the streets of Calcutta. So that is not an aberration I would think. But nevertheless, nevertheless, from the point of view of the mother, the really timid mother, he is a stranger, he is an other, he is a foreigner and they have, you know.

“Professor - student conversation starts” Strong suspicion. Yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** She is very very suspicious of this outsider figure and there are so many outsiders in her eyes, right. Ranging from snakes to the European soldiers, right. There is a range of threats for her and, and it is very interesting that the European soldiers are also tagged on to that list, you know, bringing to us this memory that these people are there, you know, at the margins threatening the locals, harassing the locals. So we need to keep that in mind too.

But the more important thing is the relationship between the father and the daughter. We, we need to read that a bit more closely because it is not a very very, not problematic relation, it is a problematic relationship again. Can we talk more about the way she... **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes, sure. What actually struck me was this parallel that at the end of the story they draw between the father, Mini and Mini's father, their relationship and, with the Kabuliwala and his daughter who would have grown up by now.

Yes. And who he has not seen her... Yes. In so many years. Yes. So that parallel is very striking may be. Yes, it is, it is, it is. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** And, and the most touching moment in the story is the imprint of the hand, right. It is not a photograph. It is not a portray. It is not a painting. It is just a, a charcoal imprint, is not it, of a hand and that is close to his heart, you know.

And that gives us, you know, the sense of a child's hand touching the heart of the father and that brings in the, the really emotional bonds between fathers and daughters and, and, okay that is very touching and pertinent in all that. But there are other sides to this relationship, you know, maybe we should talk about it? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes, so we see in the beginning of the story, Mini and her father seemed to be very close.

He says, you know, apart from the Kabuliwala, I am the only one who is there to listen to the stories unlike the mother but towards the end, the father says, I am not spoken to Mini. He has not even had proper conversation to Mini in many years. She is like she is more shy, she is not like talkative one as she was before. So, yes, we can see there is a strain in their relationship. Yes. So I think that has a lot to do with the societal conditioning of girls and specially in that era that

once they start growing up, they are taught to be, you know, more girl like, somehow and more reserved.

Yes, despite the fact that father claims to himself to be, you know, very modern and like a not concerned with these things. We can still see that ultimately it does turn out to be that typical. Yes, yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** And that is very interesting. Because at the beginning, as you guys mentioned that she has a very very close bond with the father and it is a physically, spatially made clear.

She sits at the feet of the father while he is working at the desk, right, while he is writing novels or stories and he says go away, I have some work to do. But she does, she does not go away, she sticks to the father, right until the Kabuliwala arrives, until this exotic stranger with, you know, resins and other dry fruits to offer her. So, she has a very close relationship at the cost of her relationship with her mother and the very very interesting thing at least to me is that the absence of, you know, small companions for her.

She, she grows out with all these adults, right, the sentry, all these servants, you know. She finds fault with the way how they pronounce certain words. She is with the grownups most of the time and that tells us that she is growing up in a very very protected environment and he is modern Bengali which means he is not going to tell his daughter about, you know, the in-laws and, and what would happen to her when she grows up, you know, all these stuff.

So they, they are cocooning her in some sense and he is almost possessive. The father is almost possessive in, in some sense, you know. As you said that, you know, I am the only listener, I am, I am the only person who listens to her stories and, and the Kabuliwala is the only other person who has a good, you know, relationship. And then once she starts to kind of move away and start making relationships with girls of her age, the father almost says that she is, she is betrayed all her, all the friends, all the, all the male friends.

So he is almost accusing her but it is no fault of hers because of the gender stereotypes with which she grows up, right. We have a very very traditional mother, very very traditional mother. I

am sure all the women in her household would also have similar opinions. So of course, she has to kind of, you know, follow the... **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Conform. Yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”**

Rules and regulations laid up by the women folk who have greater authority and control over her. So though the relationships are admirable, you know, the relationship between Kabuliwala and his own daughter back in Afghanistan and the relationship between the author and Mini, we see that these relationships are forced at the cost of other relationships and, and that makes us wonder why, what facet of patriarchy comes to the surface in the figure of all these modern fathers who adore their daughters.

Adoring the daughters is not the norm in society. Adoring the sons is the norm, right. So sons are preferred. Sons are (()) (46:40). Sons are spoilt to death. But these figures for the first time in the 19th century, these fathers loved their daughters. They missed their daughters. They carried the, you know, etched handprints of their daughters around. That is very remarkable, that is very striking.

But it is still not admirable because in my reading, we see different kinds of patriarchy coming up to the surface to kind of once again, you know, hold the daughters close to their chest and not leave them to lead their own lives, find their own pursuits and pleasures and productive lives. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** And also I think it is also at the cost of, you know, basically branding the mother as backward.

Yes, absolutely., absolutely. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** I totally agree, I totally agree. We did talk about it. In fact, the Kabuliwala's wife is never mentioned, not even once and again we have a dysfunctional family here because the little girl asks father who is mum to you and he thinks in his mind, sister-in-law but he does not spell it out. So again we have this questions, perhaps she is not the biological mother who is there in the story and perhaps is that the reason that she is being very very rigid, straight, disciplinarian towards his bigger.

All these questions come up, right. So why have a dysfunctional family that, why not have a

completely happy family at the heart of the story and still have this outsider for you come in? Why not have that? Why is the father securing the daughter to his own heart? So these questions can be asked in relation to this particular story. Yes? So patriarchy has different forms and faces and we need to be very very careful in, in spotting all these.

So other issues, issues of economic deprivation, can we talk about? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes, definitely. So like Mini's family and Kabuliwala, the class difference and the difference in their economic status. Yes. What do you think of that? Especially Mini's father giving him money and then... Yes, yes, yes. That is, that is a very interesting point. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”**

He is an aristocrat, the writer. Father is an aristocrat and he is living in really comfortable circumstances. He does not seem to be doing any kind of job in the modern sense of the word. Perhaps he is a land of gentry. He lives off his land, of the rents that he gets from the land. However, you know, Kabuliwala is in straight circumstances. He has to collect the money for the wares that he sold if he has to go back even to his homeland.

So he lives in, in tight circumstances moneywise and then once he has been put in jail. I mean, and even the reasons for being in jail is very interesting because it is money which is at the heart of the crisis there because one, you know, creditor refuses to give him the money back, right. The person who got a shawl from him. So money does cause trouble ultimately, if you just, you know, un, unpack everything, it will, it will lead, you know, you to this issue of money and who has it and who does not have it.

Okay, so that is one thing and then at the end of the story, this father gives him some money so that he can go back and forge relations with his daughter and, and that will symbolically have a good effect and, you know, a benediction on his own relationship with his daughter is going to leave the parental home. So even that money is given with that, you know, selfish, you know, idea in the mind that somehow he will get the benefit, spiritually speaking.

So money and patriarchy, father-daughter relationships go hand-in-hand here in some sense and

in fact, the Kabuliwala does not want to get money for the fruits that he sells her, right. The dry fruits that he sells her because Mini becomes surrogate daughter for him. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes. Yes? You can also highlight how vulnerable Kabuliwala is because of again his, may be, status as foreigner or whatever it is because he does not have any way to redress or any way to contact.

He is just put in jail. His family is not; you do not know his family has been informed. Nobody is informed. He does not have any contact with anybody. Absolutely. Redressal mechanism of that sort. Yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** Everybody forgets about him. That is what the father says, we all forgot about him while we are busy with our own routines, right. So, and, and in fact, glide just goes on.

And he, this person who is supposed to roam the lands as a, as a nomadic trader, he is from Afghanistan, so the traveller, the fact that this traveller is caged is again very very pathetic because it, it contrasts his freedom with his present incarceration. Is not it? So I, I think we have covered many of the thematic trajectories over these 4 texts, especially if you have any leftovers. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes, I think there is one thing that I would like to cover and that theme has not been covered in all the 4 stories.

But I think it is a very, very important theme in Summer Vacation and that is the theme of death actually. Yes. So basically in one instance, Ammu asks that when will you die Muthassi and that is considered a taboo in our society and I, I think Kamala Das has used this character Ammu really well because she is a child and she does not know about the world that well. So she can put out this question but this question could not have been put forward by any other character.

Yes. Yes. Absolutely, absolutely. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** In fact, Summer Vacation is littered with references to death, right. So many of Muthassi's companions have died before her. Ammu's mother, you know, all her other relatives. So she is like that single, lone, Njaval tree which is still there, you know. Even though that is very very predominant and, and it is almost an obsession to Ammu because she is worried that she will also lose this mother figure, Muthassi and then she will become completely motherless and that is a very very scary prospect

with all these men around for her.

So that is why she keeps constantly asking this question and, and she needs reassuring both by Muthassi and by her father that she will not die. But there are also further symbolic connections between Muthassi and other things and that is what I think is what she represents. Muthassi is representative of a particular kind of lifestyle, a particular way of life itself. She somehow represents tradition in itself, right which is why the tree is always there.

It is not gone away. Nobody has cut it down and, and it almost begs the people around and not to cut it down. So it, it still wants to be around. So that holds its traditional values and the system still wants to be around and Muthassi represents that which is perhaps why even in the final stages of this particular story when this little girl once again asks the father will Muthassi be around the next year when we come for the summer vacation and he assures that, do not worry, she will be there and the wheels of the train seem to turn.

Muthassi will be alive and, and things like that. So this engine of modernity, you know, this wheel which symbolizes change, in fact, seems to make a contrary assurance that this woman will be there. Do not worry. The past is going to be around. Even though we are progressing into the future, even though this child is moving away to Calcutta, this modern center to grow up, she will always come back to this past and that past is somehow guarded by this figure of Muthassi, right.

So there are symbolic resonances to the idea of death. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** And in other story which death is there is in the flood. And we can see in the end, yes, the do, after the dog dies, Chanan comes to see the dog and he thinks okay this is probably dog but we do not know what are his emotions at that point. Yes. Even that is not revealed and we have to wonder like, you know, what, does anybody miss the dog or is the dog still alive. I mean, what is, who is going to mourn it.

Yes, things like that. Absolutely. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** The thoughts as she mentioned just now, the thought, the thoughts of Chanan is not revealed to us by the narrator. It

has been deliberately suppressed. And, and we can feel that absence towards the end of the story and it is very very strange. I think I have mentioned it in my lectures as well. He just uses his tools to kind of, you know, flip the dog over in order to have a good look, right.

And, and that action is very jarring if you compare the context, that set of circumstances when the dog is being gently rocked by the eddies, the shallow waters. It is, it is as if the nature is somehow cradling this dead being and we have this human being using his foot in an irreverent manner to check whether it is his dog and in fact, we know that this dog fought with its life in order to protect the property of the master, right.

So we have lots of contrasting actions and behaviours and it, and it is difficult to even find fault with Chanan because we do not know what exactly his anticipations, his desires, his longings, his, you know, his self questioning, his doubts and so on and so forth. So all, all we know are certain glimpses into the worlds that we have been presented through these stories and we speculate, make reasonable assumptions, we criticise, find fault with, you know, we come up with our own theories.

But ultimately discussion is really very helpful to mix sense of life itself which is very complicated. So I, are we all done in terms of the thematic forays. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Yes, yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** Thank you audience for watching this video. I hope you had a productive time listening to our conversation. Thank you.